
Park Rangers Association of California
Second Quarter *Signpost* Newsletter
April 26, 2021

THE SIGNPOST

Second Quarter 2021

Spring is normally the commencement of the busy season for parks. As we continue to see high visitation numbers, President Matt Cerkel reflects on what that means for the future of our parks.

This newsletter offers ideas and resources on interpreting coyotes with Alata Walther, who spends winters as a volunteer for Orange

with Aleta Walther, who spends winters as a volunteer for Orange County Parks and summers leading interpretive hikes in Alaska.

Keep reading for an insight into PRAC elections from its membership base. Member Jackson Barker reveals the fundamentals of the election process and invites you to make your voice heard.

We hope you enjoyed the virtual PRAC Conference offered in March and stay tuned for more upcoming virtual trainings.

Click here to [view this email in your browser](#)

This Month's Articles



Coyote: Interpreting the Misinterpreted

Aleta Walther offers a unique glimpse into a coyote's life, who is so much more than a



Under the Flat Hat

President Matt Cerkel



PRAC Elections and Irregularities

An insight into PRAC election process and

cat-eating canidae

[read more >>](#)

reflects on the
lingering effects of
the pandemic

[read more >>](#)

one member's ideas
on how to change it

[read more >>](#)

Coyote: Interpreting the Misinterpreted



©Wally Neumann for Project Coyote

By Aleta Walther, CIG, ATG, CTA

Coyotes adapt easily to living near people. In fact, the [Alaska Department of Fish and Game's coyote profile](#) states, “In the wake of man's relentless expansion into wildlife's domain, few species have been able to coexist and even expand their range as well as the coyote.”

As most PRAC members know, coyotes resemble underfed German shepherds and are generally nocturnal, secretive creatures, who avoid human contact. That's why even though coyotes roam throughout our wildlands, parks and neighborhoods, we rarely see one. Therefore, for me, it is thrilling to catch a glimpse of one darting across a trail, bounding across a meadow or racing across a road. When I do see one, I think, “how cool.”

On the other hand, if such an encounter takes place during an interpretive walk or hike, a guest may spew vitriol about a coyote eating his or her cat. Having lost a cat to a coyote, I empathize, but again, I think, “how cool, a teachable moment.”

My reaction to a coyote sighting often sets the tone for how my guests perceive an encounter. Therefore, when I see a coyote, I exclaim, “A coyote, how cool is that?!” Then, I listen to my guest's story about a coyote snatching a pet. I have discovered that often guests just want to be heard, and once heard, are more receptive to learning how humans need coyotes more than they need us.

Ecological Role

“Coyotes play an important ecological role by keeping other wildlife in check,” I explain to guests. “If we eliminate coyotes, our yards, orchards and gardens may be damaged by rodents, rabbits or raccoons. They also eat squirrels, skunks, snakes and feral cats that eat eggs and baby birds. Coyotes constrain these avian predator populations through competitive exclusion, thereby having a positive impact on bird diversity and abundance.”

As scavengers, coyotes also clean up animals hit by cars or those who of natural causes. In short, coyotes are our friends if we manage our coyote interactions.

I also offer guests the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s [Keep Me Wild](#) brochure, coyote version. In addition, [Projectcoyote.org](#) offers a variety of educational resources to download and distribute to park visitors.





Howls, Yips and Yaps

Human fear of coyotes is rooted in the folklore of the American West and magnified by:

- their stealthy nocturnal behavior
- their [high-pitched howls, yips and yaps](#)
- news reports of rare attacks on humans
- movies portraying coyotes as marauding packs.

My guests often find it surprising to learn coyote attacks on people are rare. According to the [Humane Society of the United States](#) “more people are killed by errant golf balls and flying champagne corks each year than are bitten by coyotes.” The thought of airborne corks and wayward golf balls usually elicits laughs from my guests and lightens their moods as we continue down the trail.

Under the Flat Hat





PRAC President Matt Cerkel

As I write this, it seems we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel of the pandemic. What changes will that bring to our parks? Personally, I feel that the huge spike of use we have seen in the past year will level off, but we will not go back to pre-pandemic levels of use. In all likelihood, many of the new faces we have seen in our parks in the past year will continue to be part of our visitor base moving forward. How will we and our agencies adapt to these changes?

Another change the pandemic has brought to us is how we meet and even train together. Virtual and online meetings, interviews and training have become common and mainstream. It has been an adjustment for many of us, but it has its advantages. For

an adjustment for many of us, but it has its advantages. For example, as we follow the virtual meetings of our governing bodies, it gives us better insight into how elected officials and senior managers make their decisions. I would encourage all of you to attend some of these virtual meetings or watch their recordings. Another advantage is that more trainings will be available online through PRAC without travel expenses. In May, PRAC will be launching its new virtual training program and will be hosting a training session on SARTopo hosted by Region 1 Director Michael Warner (additional details forthcoming). This training, along with our recent virtual conference will be available on [PRAC's new YouTube Page](#).

If you have ideas or would like to host a virtual training session, please contact me at my PRAC email: matt@calranger.org. PRAC would benefit from more involvement from our membership.

This brings me to another topic, PRAC has several committees that are made up from our membership. These committees play key roles in shaping various aspects of PRAC. Here's a list of our committees:

- Awards Committee
- Ranger Certification Committee
- Nominating Committee
- Scholarship Committee
- Conference Committee

If you are interested in serving our membership and want to shape the future of PRAC, please contact me or your Regional Director. Currently, we are going to be finalizing our updates to our Ranger Certification Standards and need a few members to help finish the process. The standards cover the following areas:

- Interpretation
- Resource Management
- Maintenance & Operations (Park Stewardship)
- Fire Management
- Emergency Medical Services
- Law Enforcement

We plan to roll out the revised standards and certification in time for our 2022 conference.

Finally, we are currently working on our 2022 Conference. We are planning to either return to the Yosemite area or go to the Monterey region.

PRAC Elections and Irregularities





By Jackson Barker

I know, who wants to hear about more problems with elections? Well, believe it or not, we have a few at PRAC. For several years, we have been electing Regional Directors on statewide (including Nevada) ballots. There are a number of logistical issues which have led to this condition, which has been further exacerbated by moving to electronic ballots. To illustrate the basic problem, every member votes on every position including those outside their own region. In a democratic parlance, this is a violation of the concept of “one man, one vote”.

There are two ways to correct the problem: 1. Make all offices statewide (including Nevada) for elections. This would mean regional directors would become directors “at large” and could be elected outside those regions; or 2. Hold “region only” elections for Regional Directors and PRAC-wide elections for other officers.

This subject was on the agenda for the General Meeting which was held by Zoom on 3/16. Unfortunately, there were not sufficient members present to form a quorum and the topic was tabled to the next General Meeting, which will happen a year from now. A lively discussion evolved anyway among the officers and directors and the few general members present. There was a consensus that the topic requires broader membership involvement and input for decision-making.

So we come to you to resolve this problem! There are pros and

cons to both sides of the two options and a host of logistical problems, if the “Regional” concept prevails. You should know a few things: 1. Regions are **not** equal in membership counts (which is in itself a violation of the one man/one vote concept); 2. Elections are currently staggered to odd/even years, so that the entire board of directors doesn’t change out overnight; and 3. Many rangers ride on their agency’s membership and don’t pay dues or vote. There are currently 96 individual and 13 agency members. We have five regions: Northern CA, Central CA, Southern CA, San Diego to San Bernardino, and Nevada.

The “regional” concept was that it dampened the effect that one well-populated area would dominate PRAC governance and it would give a voice to all areas of the state (and Nevada). It was also thought that it would stimulate PRAC membership by growing an interest within that region and agencies. Regional Directors were expected to recruit, conduct trainings, facilitate fraternity and cohesiveness among the rangers and park professionals. However, as mentioned earlier, not all regions are equal in membership or even close, which leads to an issue similar to why does Wyoming have the same number of Senators as California? In Congress, that inequity is balanced by the House of Representatives, which is population driven.

The argument in favor of “at large” directors is that at least in the broad sense, it is more democratic – all votes count the same. It is, easier to administer it eliminates the risk of the “tyranny of the minority”.

So this was a snapshot of the problem and the potential solutions. Give it some thought, talk to others about it to get their input. This won’t solve all governance problems, but it will solve a big one.

While you're talking to other park people ask them to join PRAC. We're stronger together and we need good people to step up and take on leadership positions. With the number of park people in CA, we should be the premier park organization in the country!

PRAC Officers, Directors and Staff

President: Matt Cerkel

(415) 609-3863 matt@calranger.org

Vice-President: Candi Hubert

(714) 357-7861 region4@calranger.org

Region 1 Director: Mike Warner

(925) 960-2400 region1@calranger.org

Region 2 Director: Aylara Odekova

(703) 380-9202 aylara@calranger.org

Region 3 Director: Richard Weiner

(909) 952-1520 region3@calranger.org

Region 4 Director: Mason Gannaway

(714) 357-7861 region4@calranger.org

Region 5 Director: Andy Brown

(775) 849-2511 region5@calranger.org

The Signpost Editor: Aylara Odekova

newsletter@calranger.org

Executive Manager: Betsy Anderson

(707) 884-3949 office@calranger.org

webmaster@calranger.org

Webmaster: Jeff Price
(805) 278-9201 webmaster@calranger.org

Thanks for reading! Please [let us know](#) if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues of *The Signpost*.

Our mailing address is:

Park Rangers Association of California
PO Box 153
Stewarts Point, CA 95480-0153

Add us to your address book

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.